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CARLYLE

PERSONALLY

AND

IN HIS WRITINGS

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DAVID MASSON





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CARLYLE

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Two Edinburgh Lectures

BY

DAVID MASSON.

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following Lectures were prepared for the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh, and were delivered, with the exception of a few passages, before audiences consisting of members of that Institution, on the evenings of 24th and 27th February in the present year.

EDINBURGH : *April* 1885.



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CARLYLE PERSONALLY



## LECTURE I.

### CARLYLE PERSONALLY.

FOUR years ago, on the 5th of February 1881, Carlyle died, in his house in Cheyne Row, Chelsea, in the eighty-sixth year of his age. If ever a man died in peaceful dignity and amid universal honour, it was surely he. It was not merely that he had long been the venerated Patriarch of British Literature, an acknowledged sovereign among the British men of letters of his generation. There had gathered round him, moreover, to a degree distinguishing him from even the best and highest of his literary contemporaries, that peculiar kind of enthusiastic national regard which is due to a heroic and unsullied life and to a nobly extraordinary personality.

While he was but in the middle of his manhood, and had thirty-seven years more of life and labour still before him, his dying friend John Sterling had sent him this message of farewell,—“Towards me it is still more true than towards England that no man has been and done like *you*”; and during those thirty-seven years Sterling’s words had become almost an accepted formula for myriads of persons in all parts of the English-speaking earth when they thought of Carlyle and would express their admiration for him and obligations to him. And so, as I have said, it was in peaceful dignity and amid universal honour that the old man died at last; and, when his body was borne, privately and unostentatiously, to its simple resting-place in the burying-ground of his native Ecclefechan, there were thousands that followed it thither in imagination, to stand round the spot reverently and with uncovered heads, think of all that the old man had been, and take loving leave of him with the prayer,—



“ Quiet consummation have,  
And renownèd be thy grave !”

Alas ! there was to be no such “ quiet consummation ” for Carlyle and his labours when they laid him in the grave. It is as if, during the four years that have elapsed since then, there had been a perpetual hurrying and skurrying of rude feet to and from his lonely sepulchre, with something of that result which is described for us at the close of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*. The Athenian misanthrope, we are there told, had prepared his own grave, and had left the world with this invitation for all and sundry that might be interested in him posthumously,—

“ Thither come,  
And let my gravestone be your oracle.”

And, when they do come to the solitary spot, this is the epitaph which they are said to have found already inscribed upon the tombstone by the hands of the dead man himself, who had ironically invited them thither,—

“Here lies a wretched corse, of wretched soul bereft :  
Seek not my name : a plague consume you wicked  
    caitiffs left !  
Here lie I, Timon ; who, alive, all living men did hate :  
Pass by and curse thy fill ; but pass, and stay not  
    here thy gait.”

The majority, we are left to suppose, depart half-affrighted and half-angry, veiling their fright and anger in attempted agreement merely to laugh. For even the thoughtful Athenian general, the finest-fibred of them all, had at first but this charitable limitation to add in construing the words of the reported epitaph,—

“These well express in thee thy latter spirits” ;

and not till he had let his thoughts range back over the whole of the great and strange life that had closed in such gloom had he risen to the more generous conclusion with which he and his men are seen re-entering Athens,—

“Dead  
Is noble Timon ; of whose memory  
Hereafter more.”

That I should have lived to see the day when this, or anything like this, should

pass as a description of the state of public rumour and public feeling round the grave of Carlyle! That I should have lived to hear the great and good man I had myself the privilege of knowing characterised offhand by many, immediately after his death, as "a boor and a brute," or pitifully apologised for by others on the plea that in his "latter spirits" he was not quite himself, or even dismissed into oblivion more generously with the brief reflection what a noble phenomenon he had been all in all, and how much remained to be said of him when people should be at leisure! Here's a fine revolution! O, the horror of it, and of the way in which it has come to pass!

The instrument, as you all know, has been Carlyle's friend and literary executor, Mr. Froude. Hardly had the sods begun to join themselves over the grave in the Ecclefechan burying-ground when there came forth, under Mr. Froude's editorship, hurriedly printed and full of the most slovenly press-errors, those two volumes

1 of Carlyle's own *Reminiscences*, consisting of papers selected from his manuscripts, which are certainly among the most interesting things Carlyle ever wrote, and would have been received as such with delight by all the world, had it not been for unexpected portions and particles of their contents the publication of which acted in many quarters like the opening of a bag of wasps. Seven additional volumes of Carlyle Biography have followed, all tending in a general way to the extension and intensification of the same effect, three of them consisting of the *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, as edited by Mr. Froude, and the remaining four forming Mr. Froude's own *History of Carlyle's Life*, divided into two sections. It is these nine volumes of Carlyle Reminiscence and Biography, edited or written by Mr. Froude, that have done the mischief, if mischief it be. The Carlyle of the present day for nearly all the world is not that ideal sage and patriarch of letters that went to his grave

in peaceful dignity and amid universal honour four years ago, but is Mr. Froude's Carlyle, the Carlyle of those nine volumes.

That Mr. Froude himself intended any such mischief as has actually happened is utterly impossible. He was Carlyle's friend and trustee; again and again he declares his conviction that Carlyle, with all his faults of manner and temper, was the greatest and best man he had ever known; among our present men of literary distinction Mr. Froude stands alone in professing himself absolutely and unswervingly Carlyle's disciple in all matters of religious and political creed; it is impossible that he should have intended aught of real disrespect or real damage to the memory of his dead master. Nor must we forget the prodigious interest and impressiveness, all in all, of those nine volumes, or the fact that they themselves contain, whether in the autobiographical letters and extracts or in Mr. Froude's own comments and narrative, so much in direct contradiction and rebuke

of the paltry misjudgment of Carlyle which many readers of the volumes have carried away from them that the persistence of such readers in their misjudgment can be accounted for only by the radical smallness of the average mind, its inability to grasp or appreciate anything very uncommon. Nor, again, must we forget Mr. Froude's emphatic explanation that, in his conception of Biography, the first duty of a Biographer is unflinching honesty, and that consequently his aim in these volumes has been not to exhibit a supposititious Carlyle, or to pander to any rose-coloured expectations about Carlyle, but to represent Carlyle as he really and truly was, virtues and blemishes together. Who will gainsay this principle? Not I, at any rate. All this I have in my mind; and it is because, while I have all this in my mind, I still cannot but hold Mr. Froude responsible for much of that current desecration of Carlyle's memory which he himself must regret, and also because I cannot recognise the Carlyle of Mr. Froude

in the nine volumes as the real and total Carlyle I myself knew, that I will point out some of those respects in which, as it seems to me, there has been editorial and biographical mismanagement.

In the first place, then, as it seems to me, Mr. Froude has published a great deal that he ought not to have published. It would be very unfair, indeed, to apply to him the full strength of Tennyson's withering denunciation of the habit of posthumous publication of all sorts of details respecting the private lives of men of letters :—

“For now the Poet cannot die,  
Nor leave his music as of old,  
But round him ere he scarce be cold  
Begins the scandal and the cry :

‘Proclaim the faults he would not show :  
Break lock and seal : betray the trust :  
Keep nothing sacred : ’tis but just  
The many-headed beast should know.’”

For one thing, Mr. Froude has acted under direct commission from the deceased. The commission was so ample,

for proclamation of faults as well as merits, that it seems as if Carlyle had expressly bequeathed himself to Mr. Froude for dissection at his pleasure. For another thing, even were the principle of Tennyson's stanzas more true generally than I think it is,—the principle that the public has nothing to do with the personal character of a poet or other man of letters, but only with the writings he has himself chosen to give to the world,—Carlyle is the last man to be accorded the benefit of such a principle. He was not a man of letters of the common type, but a moralist, a public censor, a preacher and propagandist of peculiar faiths; and the public had and has some right of inquiry respecting that basis of personal character and conduct on which he stood while he preached and moralised, and whence he derived his warrant for being so loud and vehement.

Even in Carlyle's case, however, there were limits to what "the many-headed beast" was entitled to know; and Mr.



Froude has clearly transgressed them. Of Mr. Froude's boldness in printing from the private letters and papers Carlyle's most biting judgments respecting his eminent public contemporaries,—his contemptuous and iconoclastic criticisms, for example, of Keats, Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, and Mr. Gladstone,—I for one would make no complaint. These are public names and reputations ; Carlyle, who was the most fearless of talkers, had said much the same things to all about him while he was alive ; and, where he was wrong,—as I believe he was in each of the cases I have specified,—it was his own reputation that would have to take the consequence. But it was a different thing to publish sarcasms and blistering scandals about poor private persons still living, or who had lately gone to their graves and left children or other surviving relatives to be pained and injured. Here Mr. Froude is inexcusable. He had ample editorial discretion allowed him ; by Mr. Carlyle's instructions he could omit what he chose, burn what he chose, delay

or postpone publication as he might find best. My own belief is that Carlyle himself never contemplated such reckless publication of the private and unessential asperities of his letters and journals as Mr. Froude has thought proper, and that, therefore, in so far as the non-omission of these merely private and unessential asperities has imparted for the present a character of ferocity and hard-heartedness to the popular portrait of Carlyle, Mr. Froude cannot escape the blame. True, the asperities are originally and authentically Carlyle's own; there they stand in black and white, in Carlyle's own hand or from his dictation. But is it not recognised all the world over that there is a distinction between writing a thing in a private letter or journal and publishing the same thing in print? Do we not all of us write every day in private letters and journals, or say in the confidence of conversation, things that we do not intend for the public; and would not life be impossible, and society be cracked to pieces, but for the safeguard of conventional respect

for the sacredness of this distinction? Even if Carlyle had instructed Mr. Froude to publish all the private asperities,—which he most certainly did not,—that would be no shelter for Mr. Froude; for no man can depute to another the right of doing what is in itself wrong. One comfort, now that the wrong has been done, is that time will to some extent repair that misfortune. As these pungencies about poor private persons have flavoured the books for immediate interest, even in quarters where the wrong has been condemned, so they will continue to flavour the books after the poor aggrieved victims have died off the scene; and they may then be acceptable, and perhaps valuable, simply as characteristic Carlyliana. In another matter, however, in which Mr. Froude has exercised the same indiscretion, the damage is not likely to be so reparable. If Carlyle had a right to leave himself for dissection, even he had no right to leave his wife also for dissection. Yet has not this also been part of Mr. Froude's assumption as to the nature of the duty

intrusted to him, and part of his performance? With unlimited powers to omit what he chose in Mrs. Carlyle's letters and other memorial papers, not only has he retained all the reiterated superfluities of the letters in the shape of those domestic details and descriptions of the disagreeables of housewifery which are common to all households of small means, and a specimen or two of which would have been enough; but he has made free with those most secret self-communings of Mrs. Carlyle's spirit in its hours of solitude which she had kept under lock and key from Carlyle himself, and which Carlyle himself had no right to treat as property which he could assign away. The bravest words yet spoken on this subject are those of Mrs. Oliphant. A woman spoke out here, where men were too silent; she spoke the truth in defence of her friend and of her sex; and there has been, and can be, no sufficient answer. One thing I will add in this matter. Let it be supposed that Carlyle had given *his* sanction: had Mrs. Carlyle given *hers*?

Sanction! I knew the lady; and, if there can be such a thing as indignation in the unseen world over aught that passes here below, O what a face I see, what a voice I hear, as *she* looks down on this transaction!

Another cause which has contributed not a little to the unhappy general effect of the nine volumes is the prevailing sombreness and lugubriousness of those portions of them which come from Mr. Froude's own pen. In the *Reminiscences* and the *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* these consist, of course, but of casual editorial notes and explanations; but in the four volumes of the *Biography* they form the text of narrative and comment in which the fragments of documentary material for all the eighty-five years of Carlyle's life are imbedded. Now, wherever Mr. Froude himself thus becomes the narrator or commentator, his mood is too uniformly like that of a man driving a hearse.

The contrast in this respect between

what is from his own pen and much of the documentary material he digests and edits is very remarkable. There is gloom enough, seriousness enough, in the matter of the documents ; but they are not all gloomy or serious. They abound with the picturesque, the comic, the startlingly grotesque, or the quaintly pleasant ; some of them actually swim in humour, or sparkle with wit. These Mr. Froude faithfully prints, and perhaps relishes ; but they do not seem to have any influence on his own gait or countenance in his office of biographer. This is unfortunate. No mind not profoundly in earnest itself could understand Carlyle or represent him properly to others ; but, if ever there was a life that required also some considerable amount of humour in the bystander for correct apprehension and interpretation of its singularities, it was Carlyle's. Those about him that knew him best always felt that the most proper relation to much that he said and did was to take it humorously or suffuse it with humour ; and that he himself had the same

feeling and authorised it in others appeared in the frequency, almost the habitual constancy, with which he would check his conscious exaggerations at the last point with some ludicrous touch of self-irony, and would dissolve his fiercest objurgations and tumults of wrath in some sudden phantasy of the sheerly absurd and a burst of uproarious laughter. Without a recollection of this, many a saying of his, many a little incident of his daily life, is liable even now to misconstruction, or to interpretation out of its just proportions.

Take for example Mr. Froude's story of Carlyle's behaviour in the first days of his wife's severe illness in 1864 from the effects of a cab accident in the streets of London. "The nerves and muscles," says Mr. Froude, "were completely disabled on the side on which she had fallen, and one effect was that the under-jaw had dropped and that she could not close it. Carlyle always disliked an open mouth; he thought it a sign of foolishness. One morning, when the pain was at its worst, he came

“into her room, and stood looking at her,  
“leaning on the mantelpiece. ‘Jane,’ he  
“said presently, ‘ye had better shut your  
“mouth.’ She tried to tell him that she  
“could not. ‘Jane,’ he began again, ‘ye’ll  
“find yourself in a more compact and pious  
“frame of mind if ye shut your mouth.’”

This story Mr. Froude received, he tells us, from Mrs. Carlyle herself; and there is no doubt as to its authenticity. What I am sure of is that Mr. Froude treats it too gravely, or might lead his readers to treat it too gravely, by missing that sense of the pure fun of the thing which was present in Mrs. Carlyle’s mind when she remembered it afterwards, however provoking it may have been at the moment. She used to tell the story, I believe, to others, generally with the explanation that Carlyle had been reading Catlin’s book on the North American Indians, and had been struck with Catlin’s observation that the good health of the red men was owing in great measure to their rule of keeping their mouths always closely shut and



breathing only through their nostrils. Indeed, it was one of Mrs. Carlyle's habits, just because of her boundless respect and affection for her husband, to play in imagination with his little eccentricities, and amuse her friends and bewilder his worshippers with satirical anecdotes at his expense. One of the pleasantest sights in the Cheyne Row household on a winter evening was Carlyle himself, seated in a chair by the fire, or reclining on the hearth-rug, pipe in mouth, listening benignantly and admiringly to those caricatures of his ways, and illustrations of his recent misbehaviours, from his beloved Jane's lips.

Insufficient appreciation of the amount of consciously humorous, and mutually admiring, give-and-take of this kind in the married life of the extraordinary pair, both of them so sensitively organised, has had much to do, it seems to me, with that elaborately studied contrast of them and too painful picture of their relations which Mr. Froude has succeeded in impressing upon the public. There were, it is true,

passages of discord between them, of temporary jealousy and a sense of injury on one side at least, from causes too deep to be reached by this explanation; but it rubs away many a superficial roughness; and, if Mr. Froude had been more susceptible of humorous suggestions from his subject, he would not, I believe, have found this married life of Carlyle and Jane Welsh so exceptionally a tragedy throughout in comparison with other married lives, and would not have kept up such a uniform strain of dolefulness in his own performance of the part of the chorus. The immense seriousness of Carlyle's own mind and views of things, the apparent prevalence of the dark and dismal in his own action and monologue through the drama, even *required*, I should say, an unusual power of lightness in the chorus, and this not as mere trick for literary relief, but actually for insight, correction, and compensation.

Here, however, we touch upon what I

consider yet another fault in Mr. Froude's biographic method. His method, it seems to me, has been too exclusively subjective, and too little objective; which means that he has confined himself too much to the materials that were at hand for him in the letters, journals, and other papers left by Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle, and has not supplemented the information derived from these by any such amount of independent inquiry and research as is usually expected from a biographer.

This complaint, so far as Mr. Froude is concerned, is applicable, of course, only to the four volumes of his express Biography of Carlyle. The two volumes of Carlyle's own *Reminiscences*, and the three volumes of the *Letters and Memorials of Mrs. Carlyle*, stand apart for their independent biographic and autobiographic worth. They are necessarily to a large extent subjective, inasmuch as they record the feelings and moods of the writers through the periods over which they extend; but they are rich also in objective interest. They are hist-

orical while they are autobiographic ; they let us see the scenes in which the writers moved, the physiognomies of those they met ; they sketch for us characters and incidents we are glad to know about, and should have known nothing about, or less about, otherwise. But, when we step into the four volumes of Mr. Froude's *Life of Carlyle*, what do we find ? Abundance of new interest, both subjective and objective, it is true, in the series of Carlyle's letters which Mr. Froude has selected from those to which he had access, and in the extracts he has given from Carlyle's journals ; but, for the rest, only a narrative digesting and connecting this very material, with occasional references back to the *Reminiscences* and quotations thence, and all but entirely destitute of such additional information respecting Carlyle's life, earlier and later, as could easily have been obtained by independent inquiry and investigation.

The result is that Mr. Froude's Biography of Carlyle is little else than Carlyle himself soliloquising and journalising.

Now, without such material as is afforded by private letters and journals, a biography is apt to be unsatisfactory, and may even be unauthentic or insipid; and Carlyle's soliloquies in his journals, and his quasi-soliloquies in his letters to members of his family and others, are exceptionally interesting and impressive. But the mere subjective soliloquisings and journalisings of even the sincerest man over the facts of his life are not that life itself, but only as it were the drainage from that life in the after-musings of solitary hours; and a biographer who relies exclusively on such soliloquisings, journalisings, and after-musings for his representations of those actual passages of the life of his subject to which they refer, and does not supplement his information derived thence by information from other quarters, may well fall into mistakes, and substitute, here and there, a factitious or erroneous version of things for the reality. What I mean may be made clearer by a single example.

No event of Carlyle's life was more

dazzlingly brilliant than his Rectorial Visit to Edinburgh in April 1866. Well, I declare that the brief account of this event given by himself in the *Reminiscences*, and adopted by Mr. Froude in the *Biography*, with some extension there from the private letters, does not let us see the thing at all as it really was, but only a dull and dismaldised blur of the facts and circumstances. In that account, or those accounts, Carlyle arrives in Edinburgh "the forlornest of all physical wretches"; he struggles through his address to the students and the other incidents of the chief day as through "noisy inanity and misery"; through the remaining days of his stay in Edinburgh he is still "wae, wae"; and his only satisfaction in the whole affair is that his wife, whom he had left at Chelsea, had lived to hear of this Edinburgh triumph, and so to have "her painful, much-enduring, much-endeavouring little history now at last crowned with plain victory in sight of her own people and of all the world." Now,

it so chances that I have the whole of that Edinburgh week and its incidents perfectly within my own memory ; and I again declare that this dismalised account of it gives no idea whatever of the real facts.

On the night following Carlyle's arrival in town, after he had settled himself in Mr. Erskine of Linlathen's house, where he was to stay during his visit, he and his brother John came to my house in Rosebery Crescent, that they might have a quiet smoke and talk over matters. They sat with me an hour or more, Carlyle as placid and hearty as could be, talking most pleasantly, a little dubious indeed as to how he might get through his Address, but for the rest unperturbed. As to the Address itself, when the old man stood up in the Music Hall before the assembled crowd, and threw off his Rectorial robes, and proceeded to speak, slowly, connectedly, and nobly, raising his left hand at the end of each section or paragraph to stroke the back of his head as he cogitated what he was to say next, the crowd listen-

ing as they had never listened to a speaker before, and reverent even in those parts of the hall where he was least audible,—who that was present will ever forget that sight? That day and on the subsequent days of his stay there were, of course, dinners and other gatherings in Carlyle's honour. One such dinner, followed by a larger evening gathering, was in my house. Then too he was in the best of possible spirits, courteous in manner and in speech to all, and throwing himself heartily into whatever turned up. At the dinner-table, I remember, Lord Neaves favoured us with one or two of his humorous songs or recitatives, including his clever quiz called *Stuart Mill on Mind and Matter*, written to the tune of "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch." No one enjoyed the thing more than Carlyle; and he surprised me by doing what I had never heard him do before,—actually joining with his own voice in the chorus. "Stuart Mill on Mind and Matter, Stuart Mill on Mind and Matter," he chaunted laughingly along



with Lord Neaves every time the chorus came round, beating time in the air emphatically with his fist. It was hardly otherwise, or only otherwise inasmuch as the affair was more ceremonious and stately, at the dinner given to him in the Douglas Hotel by the Senatus Academicus, and in which his old friend Sir David Brewster presided. There too, while dignified and serene, Carlyle was thoroughly sympathetic and convivial. Especially I remember how he relished and applauded the songs of our academic laureate and matchless chief in such things, Professor Douglas Maclagan, and how, before we broke up, he expressly complimented Professor Maclagan on having "contributed so greatly to the hilarity of the evening." Other things of that week are still in my memory; but this will be enough for my present purpose.

In this particular case the gloominess of Carlyle's recollection of what was really one of the splendours of his life may be accounted for by the fact that the splendour

was darkened for him ere it was well over by the terrible shock of his wife's death in his absence, so that thenceforward he looked back on all things as through a veil of crape. In other matters, however, as well after that calamity as before it, we lose much, and are even led into misconception, by Mr. Froude's habit of implicitly accepting Carlyle's own soliloquisings and journalisings as always a sufficient record of the facts of his real life, and spinning the narrative out of these exclusively, without quest of further information or of other evidence. Indeed there are certain fixed suppositions of Mr. Froude's own in his narrative which could not have been derived from the letters and journals, and which a little research or inquiry would have dissipated. If Mr. Froude had consulted any person familiar with Scottish society as it was sixty years ago, and still is, would he have made so much turn on the pivot of that conception of Carlyle as the low-born man of genius, the Annandale peasant, the mason's son of Ecclefechan,

who had married the high-born lady and heiress of Craigenputtock, the surgeon's daughter of Haddington? His own documents could have told him that Carlyle's wife was an "heiress" only in the sense that, after she had been married to Carlyle sixteen years, a property worth about £200 a year was added on her side to their income from his earnings; and any Scottish person could have told him that there was nothing extraordinary whatever in the match between the educated son of a Scottish peasant and the daughter of a Scottish provincial surgeon, and that, if Jane Welsh had not married Carlyle, and been promoted by that marriage to a sphere far higher in the world's affairs than would otherwise have been within her reach, she would have probably lived and died the equally drudging wife of some professional Scottish nobody. Again, if Mr. Froude had taken the trouble to inquire a little, or even to study the facts before him, would he have so persistently represented the whole of the Scottish

portion of Carlyle's life as such an exceptionally severe struggle against external hardships? Positively, from the time of his leaving the University to the Craigenputtock days, Carlyle's life was, in external respects, one which ninety-nine out of any hundred of his contemporaries at the University might have envied. Singularly happy in his parentage and kindred, he found occupation after occupation, and threw off occupation after occupation, such as must have seemed of satisfactory respectability to other college-bred men of his own age and standing, and which many of them would have been glad to get; and,—thanks to his own integrity and frugality,—he was even in those days always master of more money beyond his yearly needs than many of those college contemporaries of his were ever to have in bank in the whole course of their pilgrimage through the world. Then, in fact, just as afterwards, the real misery, so far as there was misery, was wholly of internal origin. It was the fretting of such a

sword in such a scabbard, or in any scabbard ; it was the irreconcilability of such a soul with such a medium of circumstances, or with any medium of circumstances ; it was that " raal mental awgony in my ain inside " about which Carlyle and his wife used to jest with each other to the last as his sole incurable ailment.

It is this lifelong agony of Carlyle's own spirit, this strange constitutional grimness and gloominess of his through all the external changes of his life, that we have now especially to consider.

The autobiographical letters and papers in the nine volumes which Mr. Froude has published are certainly, in this respect, an astonishing revelation. Not that every one who knew anything of Carlyle by observation or report since he first became famous had not already heard enough about his dyspepsia, his insomnia, and his habitual wofulness of mood.—As long ago as 1844 Mr. R. H. Horne, in his book of literary gossip called *New Spirit of the Age*, had amused the world with the story

of a passage-at-arms between Carlyle and Leigh Hunt at the close of a small evening party in the house of a common friend in one of the London suburbs. The story is quite authentic ; for the late G. L. Craik told me that he was the host on the occasion, and that the scene of the affair was his house in Cromwell Lane, one of the quiet lanes in the then semi-rustic stretch of cottages and garden-grounds that lay between Brompton and Kensington. The party had sat for some hours, Leigh Hunt and Carlyle the principal talkers, and Leigh Hunt insisting always on the bright and cheerful view of every subject, while Carlyle retorted and declaimed on the gloomy side. When they took leave at last, and came out on the doorsteps into Craik's garden, it was one of the most magnificent of clear starry nights. "Look up, Carlyle," said Leigh Hunt, seeing his opportunity : "*that* at least, up there, you will acknowledge to be beautiful." Even that failed. "Ay, it's a sad sight," replied Carlyle, after his glance at the dome of

blue and all its twinkling emeralds.—But, even with this and more of the same sort lying in the public mind about Carlyle's peculiar temperament through the forty years of his living celebrity, the posthumous letters and papers have come upon most, as I have said, with all the effect of a revelation. The Lamentations of Jeremiah are not more continuously doleful. They break down, for one thing, that kind of apology for Carlyle's grimness and gloominess which would maintain that, like Timon's misanthropy, it belonged only or mainly to his "latter spirits," the final fifteen years of his extreme old age and widowerhood, when his dead wife was never out of his thoughts, and he saw everything, for her sake, through a veil of crape. There was certainly an accession of dolefulness in this final period of his life; but essentially the same vein of gloom, grimness, lamentation, and self-pity, as the posthumous letters and papers now prove, had been perpetual in his life from the very first. "*Wae, wae!*", "*Ay de mi, ay*

*de mi!*”, “*Stupiditas stupiditatum, omnia stupiditas!*”, is the burthen of the communication from first to last. “Grim and sorrowful”; “solitary, eating my own heart”; “my curse deeper and blacker than that of any man”; “bearing the fire of hell in an unguilty bosom”; “I could read the curse of Ernulphus, or something twenty times as fierce, upon myself and all things earthly”; “an unhappy mortal, with nerves that preappoint me to continual pain and loneliness, let me have what crowds of society I like”: such are the phrases that recur with appalling frequency, and yet wonderful power of verbal variation, in his descriptions of his own mood and mental condition in almost every stage of his career from youth to old age, with nothing to relieve the picture except his avowal that he was conscious of having had at all times a fund of “desperate hope” in him, an invincible stubbornness of resolution to go on and conquer, and except also an occasional admission that his sadness was “streaked with wild gleamings of



a very strange joy," and that he had "moments of inexpressible beauty, like auroral gleams on a sky all dark." What are we to say to this?

We can say, in the first place, that Carlyle's melancholy, even in its fiercest rages and paroxysms, was not a melancholy like that of Swift, fed at its roots from contemplations chiefly of the infra-human, the Yahooish, or the diabolic, but was radically a melancholy of a diviner kind. It was essentially a religious melancholy, touching the metaphysical on all sides, and taking in not only the darkness of the under-world, but also the stars and the meteors. "One night, late," we find him writing to Sterling from Scotsbrig in July 1837, "I rode through the village where " I was born. The old kirkyard tree, a " huge old gnarled ash, was nestling itself " softly against the great twilight in the " north. A star or two looked out, and the " old graves were all there, and my father " and sister ; and God was over all." This is the kind of melancholy into which

Carlyle's mind settled when it was most tranquil, as might be instanced by scores of similar passages in the letters and journals interspersed with the more stormy outbursts ; and who does not perceive the divineness of such a melancholy, and would not desire to be possessed by it in some equal degree ? Nor was it poetical merely, the transient sensation of highly-strung nerves, vanishing in beautiful and musical expression, and without effect on action and conduct. The notion of Carlyle as in any sense a misanthrope, a hard-hearted man, a mere raging or railing egotist, is one of those absurdities, those perversions of the actual truth into its very opposite, which arise not from mere insufficiency of knowledge, but from a moral incapacity of understanding anything unusually complex in character, and a malevolent predetermination to resist evidence. Mr. Froude's iterated and reiterated testimony that Carlyle, with all his surface asperities, all his wayward and sometimes furious irascibility, all his dislike of senti-

mentalism in every form, and all his resoluteness in letting those near him know exactly what he thought about them or their business in every case and never prevaricating or flattering in the least,—Mr. Froude's testimony that Carlyle, with all this, was yet, essentially and practically, one of the kindest, most generous, and most tender-hearted of men, could be confirmed on affidavit by all who were within the circle of his acquaintance. Miss Martineau, in her description of him from her own knowledge, actually singled out for special note, as that in his character which distinguished him most from all other men she had seen, his enormous power of *sympathy*. It was a most correct observation. No one who knew Carlyle but must have noted how instantaneously he was affected or even agitated by any case of difficulty or distress in which he was consulted or that was casually brought to his cognisance, and with what restless curiosity and exactitude he would inquire into all the particulars, till he had conceived

the case thoroughly, and as it were taken the whole pain of it into himself. The practical procedure, if any was possible, was sure to follow. If he could do a friendly act to any human being, it was sure to be done ; if the case required exertion, or even continued and troublesome exertion, that was never wanting. I could give striking instances out of my own recollection ; and I rather regret that Mr. Froude has not enforced and impressed his general statement by more detailed narratives of a few such instances. Perhaps, however, it was hardly necessary. He who can read the *Reminiscences* or the letters and extracts from the journals in the *Biography* without perceiving what depths of tenderness there lay in this rugged man has no heart for tenderness or power of perceiving it anywhere. Take, from the *Reminiscences*, this passage of tribute to his wife's memory, and of mingled grief and self-humiliation :—

“ Here [in Cheyne Row] we spent our two-and-thirty years of hard battle against fate, hard but not quite

unvictorious, when she left me, as in her car of heaven's fire. My noble one! I say deliberately her part in the stern battle,—and, except myself, none knows how stern,—was brighter and braver than my own. Thanks, darling, for your shining words and acts, which were continual in my eyes, and in no other mortal's. Worthless I was your divinity, wrapt in your perpetual love of me and pride in me, in defiance of all men and things. And I was Thomas the Doubter, the unhoping, till now the only half-believing in myself and my priceless opulences! . . . Blind and deaf that we are! Oh, think, if thou yet love anybody living; wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust-clouds and idle dissonances of the moment, and all be at last so mournfully clear and beautiful when it is too late!"

( There were, I say, infinite depths of tenderness in this rugged man. Not even in the partner of his life whom he so bewailed and commemorated, woman though she was, and one of the most brilliant of her sex and the most practically and assiduously benevolent, were there such depths and dissolutions of sheer tenderness as there were in *him*.

May we not, however, have something else to say respecting that monotone of grimness, gloominess, misery, and self-pity which runs so interminably through Carlyle's soliloquisings and journalisings?

We may recur to our question whether this, after all, represents Carlyle's real and total life with nearly such sufficiency as is assumed for it in Mr. Froude's pages. Even if the course of Carlyle's life, from his youth to his old age, *was* the black river he painted it to himself as having been,—a river rolling on always black, unchangeably black,—are we to take no account of the perpetually changing scenery along the banks on either side? Does not the real life include all that the river flowed through, all to which it lent effect? But *was* the river itself so unchangeably black and gloomy? "I secretly desire to compensate for laxity of feeling by intenseness of describing," is one of Carlyle's confessions about himself; and may we not apply that confession in some degree to the series of the journalisings and soliloquisings? In fact, must not all subjective journals and letters,—all journals or letters recording the feelings of the writer and the succession of his spiritual states,—run into a groove of monotonous self-com-

plaint and self-pity, representing not so much the real daily life as the rebound from that life, the reaction from it, in relaxed hours of after-musing? Is it not in the very nature of the habit of subjective journalising and letter-writing to generate what may be called in a sense a factitious self beside or underneath the real self, and to collect as it were the mutterings and groanings of this side-self, the surplus drainings as it were of the unused acid of the mind in the day's work, and offer these too unreservedly as the real life and personality? On one occasion, when the letters of the young Carlyle of Kirkcaldy to his family in Annandale had been in such a strain of despondency as to cause real alarm among them, he had actually forgotten the fact before the replies came, was amazed at the trepidation he had caused, and wrote back that they surely knew him well enough by this time to be aware that he was not being killed every time he called out "murder." Without detriment to the truthfulness of all his

subsequent soliloquisings and journalisings in the same gloomy vein, or to the value of such revelations of the ingrained melancholy of such a man, may we not subject the soliloquisings and journalisings as a whole to some such abatement as this anecdote suggests ?

Perhaps the last survivor of those who knew Carlyle intimately in those Edinburgh days when he was a householder in Comely Bank was the late Dr. John Gordon. Shortly before Dr. Gordon's death I had a conversation with him about Carlyle in those days, and put to him this question, "Was he then the gloomy, morose, woebegone and unsociable being he describes himself as having been ?" "Not a bit of it, not a bit of it," was the immediate and emphatic reply : "the pleasantest and heartiest fellow in the world, and most excellent company." This, with an infusion of the grander elements one revered in the later Carlyle, corresponds with my own experience, and, I think, with that of all others who saw much of him. We



heard of the dyspepsia, and knew it was there; but which of us, in Carlyle's company in his best days, ever thought of the dyspepsia, or ever regarded it as one hundredth of the actual man before us? Was it the dyspepsia that wrote Carlyle's books; or was it the dyspepsia, or the results of the dyspepsia, that attracted the affections of so many thousands to himself personally with such fascination while he lived? Through nearly the whole of his long London life his modest house by the Thames at Chelsea was perhaps the most celebrated habitation of a private man in all London, the rendezvous not only of such admirers as professed to be his disciples, but of all and sundry of all sorts, all ranks, all creeds, that were touched anyhow with a passion for beholding a genius so extraordinary and could either visit him at intervals or accomplish a single interview? And what went they out for to see? A dyspeptic, a misanthrope, a railing or a raging egotist? No; but a man of such powers of intellect and heart

in such combination as bewildered and enlarged all conventional preconceptions of what a great man might be, whose raiment as it were was of camel's hair and his food locusts and wild honey, whose words were thunders and lightnings round your head, whose very truthfulness it was that made some of them seem ferocities, and who, in the midst of his utmost ferocities, could dash in blazing grotesques of humour, and amaze and shake you with *such* a laugh. When I remember that laugh of Carlyle's and all that it implied, I cannot think, in consistency with any definition of happiness above the lowest, that his life was so very unhappy.

My own acquaintance with Carlyle dates from as far back as the early months of 1844, when he was still only in his forty-ninth year. He was then a man of tall erect figure, over five feet eleven inches in height, very lean and spare, with close-shaven lips and chin (for the fashion of beards had not then come in), and with

a complexion of such bilious ruddy as you sometimes see in a Scottish farmer who is much in the open air. Observing this and other signs of his great natural strength of constitution, it was not long before I used to prophesy that, dyspepsia or no dyspepsia, he would live to be over eighty. He crossed that boundary by full five years; and I knew him well to the end. I saw him enter on his fifties, and pass out of these into his sixties, and again out of his sixties into his seventies, and so till he was a tottering octogenarian, his lean figure latterly much shrunk from its original stature with the stoop of advancing age, his hands shaking with palsy, and his hair and beard (for he had been among the first to adopt the new fashion) gradually turning to gray, though so very gradually that it seemed as if his head would never grow quite white, and to the end there was a thick matted grizzle from the crown to the temples and neck, without a sign of baldness. During the first one-and-twenty years of my acquaintance with

him, or from 1844 to 1865, my meetings with him were very frequent, my own residence being then mainly in London; during the last sixteen, or from 1865 to 1881, my removal from London having separated us, my sights of him were only in such periodical visits as I paid to London or on the rarer occasions when he chanced himself to come to Edinburgh. All in all, few persons now living can have seen more of Carlyle than I did, or can have known him better. What, then, is my final and general opinion about him?

Allow me to express it now publicly in the exact manner in which I have expressed it more than once confidentially among my private friends:—In the course of my life, though I have seen a great many people, and not a few celebrities, there have been but two men among those I have known thoroughly and intimately,—only two, unless I allow for a possible third in reserve,—to whom I could conscientiously apply the supreme epithet of “great.” One was Thomas Chalmers. /

Tongue cannot tell, pen cannot write, one tithe of the admiration and affection with which I look back to this teacher of my first youth and still cherish his memory. It was not discipleship even then, for even then I could criticise, and could perceive his defects in the matter of learning and what not else ; still less is it discipleship now, when one of my regrets is that so many of Chalmers's fellow - countrymen should always be thinking of him merely as the ecclesiastic. It was, and is, because in Chalmers I first came in contact with a man from Nature's largest mould, who fulfilled, somehow or other, morally as well as intellectually, one's ideal of what human greatness might be. The same was and is my feeling about Carlyle. Unlike Chalmers in almost every respect, and especially with a range of historical knowledge and a depth and exquisiteness of literary culture to which Chalmers, splendidly Scythian as he was content to be in such things, made no pretension, Carlyle also fulfilled for me, though in a most diverse

fashion, the same ideal of essential originality and greatness. No profession of discipleship here either. I never could adopt all the articles of Carlyle's creed; in the earliest days of my acquaintance with him it was as often with dissent as with assent that I listened to many of his favourite objurgations; and even now, when I think of him and Chalmers together, I cannot positively determine, such is the survival of my younger admiration, which of the two I regard as essentially the greater. These two men, then, of all that I have myself known personally and intimately,—these two, with the possible reserve of an unnamed third,—stand in my category of the supremely great and good. When you remember that Edinburgh claims something of them both,—that Chalmers was wholly an Edinburgh citizen during the last portion of his life, and that Edinburgh witnessed and contained the critical beginnings of Carlyle's intellectual history,—is it strange that my fancy should always go back beyond both

to that other great and good Scotsman, more properly an Edinburgh man than either, whom we now link more immediately with Carlyle in the special series of our greatest Scotsmen of the literary order, while Chalmers stands aside on his own platform midway between? Had Sir Walter Scott lived to the ordinary age of man, I might have seen, and perhaps known, him too; as it is, he lies beyond my memory, and I can behold and touch him only in imagination. But this I do,—O how fondly!—every time I walk in Princes Street; and then the reflection always comes how strikingly the lesson that Nature never repeats herself in her greatest specimens is taught us by the fact that the very next successor to the genial, hearty, all-enjoying Scott in the series of really great literary Scotsmen should have been the man one of whose faults it was that he could never do justice to Scott,—the moody, agonised, and melancholy Carlyle.





CARLYLE'S LITERARY LIFE  
AND HIS CREED



## LECTURE II.

### CARLYLE'S LITERARY LIFE AND HIS CREED.

A PECULIARITY of Carlyle's literary life is that it was so late in beginning, or at least in arriving at the stage of success and notoriety.

Keats, who was born exactly in the same year with Carlyle, had done all his work, and gone to his grave in Rome, at the age of five-and-twenty, before Carlyle had been so much as heard of. Shelley, who was but three years Carlyle's senior, died in 1822, the year after Keats, at the age of not quite thirty; and Byron, who was Carlyle's senior but by eight years, died in 1824, at the age of thirty-six. In British Literary Chronology all these three had been strictly Carlyle's coevals; each of

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them had blazed into celebrity within sight of Carlyle after he was old enough to take note of them and be interested ; and yet, in 1824, when the last of them had gone, Carlyle, though in his twenty-ninth year, was an unknown man. To those closest about him and most intimate with him he was but a restless Annandale eccentric, who, having given up the church, and given up schoolmastering, and given up the law, and taken farewell also of those mathematical studies to which he had been originally inclined, was living on in Scotland, and mainly in Edinburgh, in a lucky private tutorship which had come in his way, and was struggling obscurely into literature by translations from the German and by anonymous articles in several Edinburgh and London periodicals. Had Carlyle died in 1824, the tradition of his existence would have been of the faintest. To us, looking back now, and aware of all that was to come, it is as if Carlyle's unusual longevity had been already decreed, and there was no need felt for hurry. In fact, in British

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For, verily, we leap ten years from  
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Literary History, as distinct from British Literary Chronology, he belongs to a generation, or to two generations, later than that of Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and altogether different.

For, when we overleap ten years from 1824, the year of Byron's death, and come to 1834, when Carlyle, now in his thirty-ninth year, planted himself finally in London, what do we find? No lack of industry, certainly, or of the fruits of industry, during the ten intermediate years of his continued restlessness between Edinburgh and his native Dumfriesshire, varied by his two tentative visits to London before his decision to settle there. Those ten years, the last seven or eight of which were the first years of his married life, and were divided between Edinburgh and the solitude of Craigenputtock, had been abundantly productive; and, when he settled in London, he was no longer a mere hack-contributor to obscure periodicals and serials. He had published, in substantive book-form, his *Translation of Wilhelm Meister*

(1824), his *Life of Schiller* (1825), and his *Specimens of German Romance* (1827); he had written about three-fourths of those articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Foreign Review*, the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, and *Fraser's Magazine*, which are now read with admiration as his "Miscellanies"; and his *Sartor Resartus*, which he had written at Craigenputtock, but which he could get no publisher to undertake as a book, was appearing in instalments in the pages of *Fraser*. There had necessarily been some corresponding growth of reputation. Jeffrey had taken Carlyle in tow; Goethe, before his death in 1832, had recognised Carlyle and entered into cordial correspondence with him; and Emerson, in his first visit to Britain in 1833, had gone on pilgrimage to Craigenputtock expressly to see such a remarkable hermit. Both in Edinburgh and in London, also, partly from the effects of Carlyle's writings, partly from his personal impressiveness and extraordinary powers of talk in whatever company he had entered in either



town, there had been formed a little knot of persons who admired him greatly and had the highest expectations of what he could achieve. Still, nothing like a general or national fame had gathered round his name, nothing of such fame, for example, as had already grown round his fellow Edinburgh-Reviewer, Macaulay, who was by five years a younger man. In short, not till 1837, when Carlyle was in his forty-second year, and had been three years resident in London,—or, rather, not till between 1837 and 1840, when he was advancing from his forty-second year to his forty-fifth,—did he burst fully upon the public. His *History of the French Revolution*, published in 1837, began his popularity, not only evoking applauses for itself, but lifting up the unfortunate *Sartor Resartus* into more friendly recognition; the first collected edition of the *Miscellanies* followed in 1838; the additions to these *Miscellanies* by his continued contributions to Magazines and Reviews, including his “Diamond Necklace” and his Essays on Mirabeau and Sir

Walter Scott, increased the impetus ; the publication in 1839 of his little book or pamphlet entitled *Chartism* called attention to him in a new character ; the four Courses of his Lectures to select London audiences in the seasons of 1837, 1838, 1839, and 1840, had aroused among the Londoners generally an interest in him as a strange Scottish phenomenon ; and the publication of the last of these Courses of Lectures in 1840, in the form of his volume entitled *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, completed the effulgence. About the year 1840, we may say, and not till then, Carlyle had shone out in his full British celebrity.

The causes of this "belatedness" of Carlyle's literary life, to use an expression of Milton's, were various. There had, certainly, been no original defect or sluggishness of genius. The young Carlyle who had just completed his classes in Edinburgh University, the young Carlyle drudging at schoolmastering in Kirkcaldy, the young Carlyle of the next few years, again walking in the streets of Edinburgh

and living by private tutorship and hack-writing, was essentially the same Carlyle that became famous afterwards,—the same in moodiness, the same in moral magnanimity and integrity, the same in intellectual strength of grasp. One is astonished now by the uniformity of the testimonies of his intimates of those early days to his literary and other powers, the boundlessness of the terms in which they predicted his future distinction. His own early letters are also in the evidence. They are wonderful letters to have been written in the late teens and early twenties of a Scottish student's life, and paint him as even then a tremendous kind of person. As respects Carlyle's "belatedness," then, may not the fact that his element was to be *prose* and not *verse* count for something? It would seem as if that peculiar kind of poetic genius which tends to verse as its proper form of expression can always attain to mastery in that form with less of delay and discipline than is required for mastery in prose; and, at all events, the

traditions of literature are such that the appearance of a new genius in verse is always more quickly hailed by the public than anything corresponding in prose. Now, much as Carlyle struggled after the faculty of metrical expression, ease in that faculty had evidently been denied him by nature, and it was in prose or nothing that he was to manifest his superiority. Nay, in his earliest prose-writings for the press one observes something of the same stiffness, hard effort, and want of fluency that characterise almost all his verse-attempts. This, however, must have been in great part accidental; for we have only to go to some of his private letters, dashed off in his twentieth year or thereabouts, to see that he had already acquired his marvellous power of picturesque and eloquent expression, and was master of a swift, firm, and musical style. But, for such a literary career as his was to be, mere gift of expression, however fluent and eloquent, was not enough. It was not enough that he should be able to write fluently and elo-

quently in a general way, by the exercise of mere natural talent, on any subject that turned up. He had to provide himself amply with *matter*, with systematised knowledge of all sorts, and especially with systematised historical knowledge. Hence the depth and extent of his readings, the range and perseverance of his studies in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, in addition to Latin and English. For writings so full-bodied as those he was to give to the world, it was necessary that he should step into literature as already himself a *polyhistor* or accomplished universal scholar; and, when he did step conspicuously into literature, it was in fact as already such a *polyhistor*.—In connection with which it is worth while to note how completely by that time Carlyle had emancipated himself from the common idea of so many of his literary contemporaries that literature ought to consist in writing about literature. To this day what are the chief subjects of the essays and books continually sent forth by our professed authors? Why, the lives

and writings of previous authors, the personages and phenomena of the past literary history of the world. We have Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, and the other literary *dii majorum gentium*, over and over again, with descents to as many of the literary *dii minorum gentium* as may be necessary for variety; and the public is thus deluged with an eternal, ever-flowing literature merely about Literature. Now, though Carlyle began in this way too,—as witness his essays on Jean Paul Richter, on Goethe and *Faust*, on Burns, on German Playwrights, etc.,—there were premonitions even then, both in his mode of handling these subjects and in the fact that such essays were interspersed with others of a more general and philosophic kind, that he would not dwell long in the element of mere literary history and æsthetic criticism, or be satisfied with adding his own contributions, however excellent, to the perpetual conversation about “Shakespeare and the musical glasses.” Accordingly, before he had

fully established himself, he had taken final leave of the mere literature about literature, and had moved on into a literature appertaining to human society and human action generally, to war and statesmanship, to poverty and crime, to the *quicquid agunt homines* in all lands and ages, literature as but one of the interests. As the capacity for this had to be included in his polyhistoric preparation, we have here also perhaps one of the causes of his comparative "belatedness."—But there was another, and the chief of all. It lies in that fundamental characteristic of Carlyle's literary genius which Goethe had detected as early as 1827. "It is admirable in Carlyle," said Goethe to Eckermann in the July of that year, "that in his judgments of our German authors he has especially in view the mental and moral core as that which is really influential. Carlyle is a *moral* force of great importance; there is in him much for the future, and we cannot foresee what he will produce and effect." Goethe here struck the

keynote. It was the depth and strength of the *moral* element in Carlyle's constitution that was to impart to his literary career its extraordinary importance and its special character of originality. Precisely on this account, however,—precisely because he was to be no ordinary man of letters, turning out book after book as an artist turns out picture after picture, but a new moral force in the British community and the whole English-speaking community of the world,—he had to bide his time. He had to ascertain and reason out his principles; he had to form his creed. When he did burst fully upon the public it was to be not only as the polyhistor, not only as the humourist, not only as the splendid prose-artist, but also,—to use a cant phrase which I do not like, though Carlyle himself rather favoured it,—as the Chelsea Prophet.

The three years between 1837 and 1840, I repeat, when Carlyle was advancing from his forty-second year to his forty-fifth, are to be remembered as the time



of his fully established celebrity. It is the more necessary to remind people of this because, forty-five years having elapsed since then, and the majority of the present generation having made their first acquaintance with Carlyle and gone through the Carlyle phrenzy in comparatively recent times, they are apt to forget that their predecessors had the advantage of them and went through that experience before the present generation was born. That is the fact. In and from 1840 Carlyle's name was running like wildfire through the British Islands and through English-speaking America; there was the utmost avidity for his books wherever they were accessible, especially among the young men; phrases from them were in all young men's mouths and were affecting the public speech; and, though he was living frugally in his small house in Chelsea on an income of not more yet than £200 a year, that house was already looked at by many Londoners, and thought of by many at a distance, as

the home of the real king of British Letters. True, he was then but midway, or hardly midway, in his total career of literary production. There were to come from him yet his *Past and Present* (1843), his first labour of Hercules in his *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1845), his *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), his *Life of John Sterling* (1851), and his second great labour of Hercules in his *History of Frederick the Great* (1858-65), besides his various new additions to his "Miscellanies" in the shape of scattered papers in periodicals, and his volume on *The Early Kings of Norway*, published as late as 1875, with an *Essay on the Portraits of John Knox*. Doubtless, these additional publications, each coming as a new stroke from the great Carlyle, increased his fame; and, doubtless, it was not till a comparatively late point in his life that the increased sales of his writings began to bring him in anything like wealth. He himself attests, with a kind of grim sarcasm, that his Rectorial Visit

to Edinburgh in 1866 and the publication of his Rectorial Address in all the newspapers marked an epoch of change in this respect. There was nothing in that Address, he said truly, that was not a mere mild dilution of ideas he had expounded again and again, and in far better and stronger form, in his books; but somehow the Rectorial jubilation had stirred even the multitudinous asses. The fact is that the effects of this Rectorial jubilation were entirely of a commercial kind, suggesting that the time had come for an issue of his books in cheap editions. For the rest, our representation is historically correct.

No need at this time of day to dilate on the literary merits of Carlyle's works. There they stand on our shelves, as extraordinary an array of volumes for combined solidity and splendour, all the product of one pen, as can be pointed to in the Literature of English Prose. It is with the *creed* running through the volumes that we are now concerned, that

system of ideas by virtue of which Carlyle became, as Goethe predicted he would become, a powerful *moral* force in his generation, and on account of which his contemporaries styled him latterly the Chelsea Prophet.

The first name affixed to Carlyle to signify a perception of the difference of his ways of thinking from those of other people was *Mystic*. This was the name given to him long ago in that Edinburgh circle round Jeffrey which he first stirred by his personal peculiarities when he was a resident in Comely Bank, and by his articles on German subjects. He seemed to be the apostle of an unknown something called "German Mysticism," and to be trying to found a school of "English Mystics." He dallied with the term himself for a while, and even took it with him to London. Intrinsically, however, there could have been no more absurd designation. By the whole cast of his intellect Carlyle was even the reverse of a mystic, constrained as he was always to definite-

ness of intellectual conception and to optical clearness of representation; and, though he had a kindly eye towards the Mystics, he could make nothing of them except by unmythicising them,—his essay on Novalis, for example, being an unsatisfactory attempt to extract gleams out of the opaque. It was the novelty of Carlyle's principles to those among whom they were first propounded, the strangeness of the objects he tried to bring within their ken, that occasioned the resort to such a misfitting epithet. A far fitter designation would have been *Transcendentalist*. Pardon me if I detain you a little with this word from the scholastic nomenclature and its applicability to Carlyle. It is easy enough to understand, and we have really no other name so suitable for the thing.

A *Transcendentalist* in philosophy is the very opposite of what we call a *Secularist*. He is the opponent of that system of philosophy which "apprehends no farther than this world and squares one's life according," that system of philosophy

which regards the visible universe of time, space, and human experience as the sum-total of all reality, and existing humanity in the midst of this universe as the topmost thing now in being. Beyond, and around, and even *in* this visible universe, the Transcendentalist holds,—this world of sun, moon, and stars, and of the earth and human history in the midst,—there is a supernatural world, a world of eternal and infinite mystery, invisible and inconceivable, yet most real, and so interconnected with the ongoings of the visible universe that constant reference to it is the supreme necessity of the human spirit, the highest duty of man, and the indispensable condition of all that is best in the human genius. In this sense Carlyle was a transcendentalist from the very first. He believed in a world of eternal and infinite realities *transcending* our finite world of time, space, sense, experience, and conceivability.

In the scholastic nomenclature, however, there may be recognised two distinct varieties of Transcendentalism. There is, first,

what may be called *Idealistic Transcendentalism* or *Transcendental Idealism*. By this idealistic theory all the apparent universe of known external realities,—sun, moon, stars, rocks, clouds, earth, and human history and tradition,—is resolved or reduced into mere present thinkings of your mind or my mind, a mere complex phantasmagory of the present human spirit; and therefore it is through this present human spirit that one has to seek the all-explaining bond of connection between the real world of finite nature and the real and infinite supernatural world. Now, though Carlyle was acquainted with this idealistic theory, had evident likings for it, and now and then favoured it with a passing glance of exposition, I cannot find that he had ever worked out the theory in all its bearings,—an enormously difficult business,—or adopted it intimately for his own behoof. He remained to the end what may be called a *Realistic Transcendentalist* or *Transcendental Realist*. By this is meant that he was satisfied to think of the world

of space and time; and of all physical and historical realities, as having substantially existed, in its essential fabric at least, very much as we imagine it, by an independent tenure from the Infinite, distinct from that of all past or present conceiving minds inserted into it and in traffic with it.


Here, however, we may note an interesting peculiarity of his special form of Realistic Transcendentalism, which latterly gave him some trouble. Though he talks of "rude nations," "rude times," etc., and recognised perhaps a certain progress in human conditions and even in the human organism, he seems essentially to have always thought of humanity as a self-contained entity, fully fashioned within itself from the first, and cut off from all its material surroundings and from any priority of material beginnings. Hence his opugnancy in his latter days to the modern scientific doctrine of evolution as brought into vogue more especially by the reasonings of Darwin. For a transcendentalist of the idealistic sort the doctrine of evolution



can have no terrors. If the world of space, time, and history is but a fabrication of our present thinkings, a phantasmagory of the present human spirit, what does it matter how much our present thinkings may change, or how many æons of so-called time and imagined processes and marches of events we may find it necessary to throw into our phantasmagory? For the transcendental realist the difficulty is greater. Though he has the ultimate relief of believing that the entire procession or evolution of things physical as modern science would represent it,—from the Universal Nebula on to the dispersed starry immensity, and so to the solar system, our earth as a planet in that system, and the history of that separate earth through the ages of its existence since it became separate,—is but one vast forth-putting or manifestation of the inconceivable Absolute, he does not like to think of himself, the paragon of animals, or of the human mind and soul, as in any way really derived from this antecedent

physical evolution, and more especially from those nearer portions of it which concern our separate earth, and lead from protoplasmic slime, through differentiated bestialism, to a special ancestry in the ape. Some transcendental realists do get over the difficulty; but Carlyle never could. In June 1868 he wrote in his Journal as follows :—

“Surely the *speed* with which matters are going on in this supreme province of our affairs is something notable and sadly undeniable in late years. . . . ‘All descended from gorillas, seemingly.’ ‘Sun made by collision of huge masses of planets, asteroids, etc., in the infinite of space.’ Very possibly, say I. ‘Then where is the place for a Creator?’ The *fool* hath said in his heart there is no God. From the beginning it has been so, is now, and to the end will be so. The *fool* hath said it,—he and nobody else; and with dismal results in our days,—as in all days; which often makes me sad to think of, coming nearer myself and the end of my life than I ever expected they would do. That of the sun, and his possibly being made in that manner, seemed to me a real triumph of science, indefinitely widening the horizon of our *theological* ideas withal, and awakened a good many thoughts in me when I first heard of it, and gradually perceived that there was actual scientific basis for it,—I suppose the finest stroke that ‘science,’ poor creature, has or may have succeeded in making during my time: welcome to me if it be a truth, honourably welcome! But what has it to do with the existence of the Eternal Unnameable?”



The speculation as to the genesis of the sun and the probable duration of his heat here adverted to by Carlyle with such recognition of its real importance came before him first, I believe, in the form of a paper by Sir William Thomson of Glasgow, which I had myself the honour of inserting in *Macmillan's Magazine*. He was much struck with the paper at the time and often mentioned it to me afterwards. It is characteristic that he should have had less objection to this speculation, assigning a definite beginning to the whole solar system, and pointing perhaps to its ultimate collapse and the cessation of all terrestrial life, humanity included, with the extinction of the sun's heat, than to the nearer scientific speculation as to the evolution of species on the earth itself and man's descent from the gorilla. It is as if he found the imagination of a wholesale crash, whether of formation or of annihilation, in the far-back vast of physical immensity, or the far-future vast of the same, more cleanly, and therefore more endur-

able, than any imagination of a materialistic derivation of the human organism, through the ape and what not, from earthly protoplasmic slime. On the whole, one may say that he lived too late to be able to accept the modern scientific doctrine of evolution and work it into his philosophy, and remained therefore at the last a transcendental realist of the old school. Or perhaps, with the foregoing passage to enlighten us, it might be fairer to say that, whatever conceptions of a cosmic evolution science might bring in, he found them irrelevant to the main matter, and did not care a rush about them in comparison with the main matter, —which was that men should continue to believe that all things had originated in a supreme and infinite eternal, the reality of all realities, and should walk in that belief as their religion.

One may be a Transcendentalist in philosophy, however, whether of the Idealistic or of the Realistic sort, and yet go through the world calmly and composedly. Not so

with Carlyle. Jeffrey's laughing complaint about him in the first days of their acquaintance was that he was always "so dreadfully in earnest"; and no one can study the records of his early life without seeing what Jeffrey meant. Carlyle's vitality from his youth upwards was something enormous. There was nothing sluggish, or sleepy, or cool in his constitution, and no capacity for being sluggish or sleepy or cool. He was always restlessly awake; to whatever subject he addressed himself, he grasped it, or coiled himself round it, as with muscles all on strain and nerves all a-tingling; and, when he had formed his conclusions, he was vehement in announcing them and aggressive in their propagation. Necessarily this was the case most of all with his conclusions on subjects the greatest and most fundamental. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" was a text quite after his own heart, and which he was fond of applying to those who seemed to him to be sufficiently right in the main in their private ways of thinking on the deepest

problems, but not to be sufficiently earnest in fighting for their conclusions and rousing and agitating society to get them accepted. Plato himself, the supreme transcendentalist of antiquity, and to this day unapproached among mankind for the magnificent sweep of clear intellect and the beauty and gorgeousness of poetic expression with which he expounded Transcendentalism once for all to the philosophic world, was in this category with Carlyle. "He was a gentleman very much at ease in Zion" was Carlyle's definition of him. In fact, with the exception of Shakespeare in Elizabethan England and of Goethe in more recent times, the calm and composed type of character, in matters of sublime concern, was not that which won Carlyle's highest regard.

Dropping now all terms of scholastic nomenclature, we may say, more simply, that Carlyle went through the world as a fervid Theist. God, the Almighty, the Maker of all,—through all the eighty-five years of Carlyle's life, all the seventy of

his speech and writing, this was his constant phrase to his fellow-mortals. "There *is* a God, there *is* a God, there *is* a God," —not even did the Koran of Mahomet fulminate this message more incessantly in the ears, or burn it more glowingly into the hearts, of the previously atheistic Arabs whom the inspired camel-driver sought to rouse than did the series of Carlyle's writings fulminate it and try to make it blaze in a region and generation where, as he imagined, despite all the contrary appearances of organised churches and myriads of clergy and of pulpits, the canker of atheism was again all but universal. When he avoided the simple name "God" or "the Almighty," and had recourse to those phrases, — "the Immensities," "the Eternities," "the Silences," "the Infinite Unnameable," —which we now think of, perhaps smilingly, as peculiar forms of the Carlylian rhetoric, it was, as he himself tells us, because "the old Numen" had become as if obsolete to "the huge idly impious million of writing, preaching, and

talking people," and he would employ any synonyms or verbal shifts by which he could hope to bring back the essential notion. In his latter days, and always in his own pious self-communings, he seems to have preferred the simple old name he had learnt from his father and mother, with its heart-thrilling and heart-softening associations. But on this subject we have his own words in June 1868, thus :—

"No prayer, I find, can be more appropriate still to express one's feelings, ideas, and wishes in the highest direction than that universal one of Pope :—

' Father of all, in every age,  
In every clime, adored  
By saint, by savage, and by sage,  
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord !  
Thou great First Cause, least understood,  
Who all my sense confined  
To know but this,—that Thou art good,  
And that myself am blind.'

Not a word of that requires change for me at this time, if words are to be used at all."

To the general fact of Carlyle's intense religiousness in the form of a fervid general theism has now to be added, as every one



knows, the equally certain fact that he had detached himself from all particular religions, past or present, so far as they had clothed this general theistic creed with miraculous theologies and mythologies. As early as his twenty-fourth year, when he was a schoolmaster in Kirkcaldy, he had abandoned, as he tells us, all belief in miraculous-interposition in the affairs of this universe, except in so far as the universe itself, existence itself, is a miracle, and had concluded that he himself must face the world, and must teach his fellow-men to face the world, with the conviction that the laws of its procedure are inwrought irrevocably in its very texture and constitution, and with no other faith than that radical and indestructible theistic faith upon which, as he thought, all the historical theologies and mythologies had been but so many incrustations. The historical religions,—Indian, Semitic, Greek and Roman, Teutonic or Norse, or whatever else,—had all been respectable and interesting, though some better and some worse, as imagina-

tive constructions prompted by the one essential and permanent faith, attempts to feature forth the inconceivable; but they had served their time, had lost their hold on the changed conditions and necessities of the human reason, and must all go.

Most important under this head, of course, is Carlyle's attitude towards the Christian religion. Here it is necessary that I should be precise. Christianity, as it has been professed by all the greatest spirits that have really believed in it anywhere on the earth through the nineteen centuries of its duration, has consisted of two things, united but distinguishable,—a *metaphysic*, or system of doctrines respecting the relations of God to man, and an *ethic*, or system of instructions for human conduct. Now, the essence of Christianity, when it offers itself as a supernatural revelation, lies, I hold, in its *metaphysic*. It lies in the belief that at a particular time in the history of mankind a miraculous shaft of light out of the unseen infinitude struck our earth in Judæa, revealing to the Jews

first, and afterwards to the Gentiles, certain things about the Divine Being and His procedure with men which men could never have found out for themselves, in the form of certain definite doctrines or propositions astonishing and almost stunning the mere human reason. The *ethic* without this *metaphysic* may call itself Christianity, but is not, I hold, Christianity in any sense worth so special a name. To tell men, however earnestly, not to tell lies, not to commit fraud, to be temperate, honest, truthful, merciful, even to be humble, pious, and God-fearing, is very good gospel; but it did not require the events of Judæa, as Christian theology interprets them, to bring *that* gospel into the world. The modern preacher who sermonises always on the ethic and omits the accompanying metaphysic may sophisticate himself into a belief that he is preaching Christianity, but is preaching no such thing. Wherever Christianity has been of real effect in the world, and has made real way for its own ethic, it has been by its

metaphysic,—that set of doctrines respecting things supernatural which was to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness.

Now, as Carlyle had wholly given up the metaphysic of Christianity, he cannot be classed among the Christians, and thought it honest to avow that he could not be so classed. Indeed, more and more, his attitude towards Christian theology in any of its known and orthodox forms settled into positive antipathy, till at last he declared it to be inconceivable to him that any man of real intellect could be found in that camp without something of conscious insincerity, and looked askance therefore on even such ecclesiastical friends of his own as Bishop Thirlwall and Bishop Wilberforce. This feeling found vent in such violent phrases as *shovel-hattedness*, *the Jew-God*, etc.; and he had even been so daring as to project a book or pamphlet to be called *Exodus from Houndsditch*, the purport of which was to be that people ought universally, as fast as

they could, to come out of the land and atmosphere of all Jewish forms and traditions, older or later, only taking care to pack up what was really their own and bring *that* along with them. Strange to observe all the while his passionate sympathy with the old Hebraic spirit as manifested in the Hebrew Prophets, the intensity of his fascination for the life and character of Christ as it is represented in the Gospels, and the depth of his recognition of the originality and beauty of the Religion of Sorrow and the power of the symbol of the Cross among the nations hitherto. He seemed, however, to think that this power had pretty nearly stopped, for the highest and most cultivated intellects, somewhere in the seventeenth century, about the time of the English Puritans and of Oliver Cromwell. So far as it had survived that time, it was, he seemed to think, in individual spirits here and there of the humbler and less instructed order, such as those Scottish ministers of the best type he had known in his childhood and

his own pious father and mother. In all this, surely, Carlyle was in serious error. Had he not been too hasty in judging what might honestly coexist with what else in a strong human mind of his own generation? Had he not underestimated the durability of the Christian metaphysic in the world, whether in its Puritan form or in another, the power of that metaphysic even yet to find noble souls susceptible of it, to pierce these souls and lodge itself in them even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and so to zigzag in unexpected fire over the earth and disseminate itself in great new expanses?

Can we be more precise as to Carlyle's own religion than by merely describing it as a fervid Natural Theism? I believe that we can. His religion, it appears to me, was a compound of two elements, one furnished from within, the other found without. In the first place, he held, there was the divine within man himself, that extract or inspiration of Deity which is in-

corporate with the very structure of the human soul, and always throbs there in the form of conscience, upward tendency, the sense of right and wrong, of the noble and the ignoble. No human soul, even the meanest, but had this structural equipment, and knew, by the very fabric of its constitution, what was right or wrong, good or bad, at any particular moment. The structural faiths of the soul of man, therefore, the constitutional postulations of the human spirit, made towards a religion, and did not leave man in a state of agnosticism. We walk by *faith*,—*i.e.* by necessary constitutional postulation and imagination accordingly. But, further, in the actual world out of ourselves through which we walk, in our experience of that world at present and in the history of that world as it comes to us by record, we meet that which rushes into union with this faith within. The world without, as well as the spirit within, was made by God, and is governed by God; what we see there, all that we see, is God working. “What are

all our histories and traditions of actions in former times," asked Cromwell in one of his speeches, "but God manifesting Himself, that He hath shaken, and tumbled down, and trampled upon, everything that He hath not planted?" This expresses exactly one part of Carlyle's religion. The superiority of the right and noble over the wrong and ignoble, the conquering power of the right and noble in the long run, and the futility or nothingness of evil, were evident in the actual rule and history of the world, preached in disaster, ruin, retribution. Divine justice stared upon you out of the very fact of things. Hence Carlyle's fondness for the phrase "the fact of things," his hammering repetitions of the word "fact," "fact"; hence his continual assertions that more of genuine instruction and spiritual nutriment is to be found in the observation and study of realities than in all fiction of so-called ideals; hence his preference of History over all other forms of Literature, or indeed contention that History includes them all, even Poetry



itself. All real wisdom, all sound morality, all that is good in private thought and conduct, or in public action and statesmanship, consists, he maintained, in accurate perception of God's will as revealed in the fact of things, and in zealous co-operation therewith and with nothing else. The impassioned going out of the divine within man to grasp and clasp the divine in the world of phenomena around him, the impassioned consent of the human spirit to subserve the ascertained workings of God, —that, according to Carlyle, was true religion, a sufficient religion, and the only religion a man could have. Here was certain knowledge, and to this extent there was a remove for us out of any torpid inane of so-called Agnosticism.

In secondary points, however, Carlyle did not refuse the name of an agnostic, but maintained that, by necessity, all men are and must ever remain agnostics. "We know nothing and can know nothing about *that*; it is for ever and by necessity beyond our ken": so he would say again

and again respecting this or that metaphysical question propounded to him. He retained a regard for Prayer, provided it were not formal, but only secret and irrepressible ejaculation and sighing to the Supreme. He had a lurking fondness for the notion of Particular Providence, though confessing to it only as a superstition which could not stand in logic. That in his original and inherited creed which he was slowest to part with was the doctrine of the immortality of the individual, of a life beyond the grave. This also, however, survived in him at last only as an occasional flicker, a great perhaps. Here is what he wrote in his journal on the 14th of October 1869, when he was close on seventy-four years of age :—

“ Three nights ago, stepping out after midnight, with my final pipe, and looking up into the stars, which were clear and numerous, it struck me with a strange new kind of feeling,—‘ Hah ! in a little while I shall have seen *you* also for the last time. God Almighty’s own Theatre of Immensity, the Infinite made palpable and visible to me, that also will be closed, flung in my face; and I shall

never behold that either any more!' And I knew so little of it, real as was my effort and desire to know. The thought of this eternal deprivation,—even of this, though this is such a nothing in comparison [with the loss of his wife, which had been the subject first in his mind],—was sad and painful to me. And then a second feeling rose in me, 'What if Omnipotence, which has developed in me these pieties, these reverences and infinite affections, should actually have said 'Yes, poor mortals! Such of you as have gone so far shall be permitted to go farther. Hope! despair not.' I have not had such a feeling for many years back as at that moment."

All in all, when one examines Carlyle's religion, one does not find that it differs very much from that Hebraic or Semitic Theism on which he commented sometimes so contemptuously, and to which he thought he had bidden farewell. *Minus* the ceremonialism and the miraculous particulars, it is the religion of the Old Testament, the religion of Job, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. If Carlyle individually had made the exodus he wanted to see general, what he had packed up and brought with him as his own out of the deserted land and its detested comradeship had a very considerable resemblance to the peculiar growths generally supposed to be there native.

Herein he was not so very different from many of his fellow-countrymen who are credited with having made the same exodus, though in a different and more orthodox direction,—to wit from Judaism to Christianity. In English and Scottish Puritanism to this day the influence from the Old Testament prevails visibly, almost overwhelmingly, over the ingredient from the New. True, Carlyle's curious antipathy to the Jewish race led him to an avowed preference for the old Teutonic or Norse mythology over the Hebrew religion, and even to the wildly exaggerated assertion that everything best and highest in the modern world is of Teutonic or Norse origin; but his own soul was more Hebraic essentially than it was Norse. The intensity of his theism was Hebraic; and one is not sure of anything more specially Norse in him than the broad general strength of manhood which he united with his earnestness, and the riotous humour which flooded that strength and mitigated its fierceness.

It would not be difficult to show that Carlyle's main doctrines in social and political matters, his well-known moral and historical Carlylisms, were all deductions, in one way or another, from his theory of religion.

While God is always working, while the quantity of the divine flowing on in the external fact of things is perhaps always constant, may not that counterpart element of the divine which consists in a parallel flow of the noblest constitutional faiths of the human spirit be of varying strength in different ages, lands, and peoples? To this question Carlyle answered emphatically "Yes," with an evident preference on his own part for the past generally over the present, a special sympathy with certain portions and populations of the Oriental and Mediterranean past, and above all, as we have just hinted, an admiration of the Teutonic race and its function in the mediæval and more modern world.

Then what of the famous Carlyle doctrine of "Hero-worship,"—a word, by

the bye, which was not of Carlyle's own invention, but which he found in David Hume's Essays, and probably borrowed thence? Every one can see how radically different was this Carlyle doctrine of Hero-worship from Comte's wretched *Culte systématique de l'Humanité*. In Comte's scheme of a theatrical substitute for religion you are called upon to worship,—what the soul of no man *can* worship,—humanity itself, as represented in so many images of deceased specimens of it, expressly on the ground that the universe is vacant of anything greater or higher, that it is “an empty, black, immeasurable eye-socket,” with beings like yourself somehow living and dying on an earthy orb in the middle of it, but tenantless throughout all its ranges of any thing or power nameable as God. In the Carlyle hero-worship, so far as you may care to adopt it, your reverence for those of your fellow-creatures that seem worthiest of reverence is invoked expressly on the principle that they were servants of

~~God and~~ may be regarded as manifestations of God. The real God who made them, and who made you, still fills the universe ; and it is He that is walking on the wings of the wind. Though, if you adopt the Carlyle hero-worship on these terms, you may save your theism, there is the further difficulty, however, of his own particular choice of heroes for you. His supreme heroes in the world's history, those for whom his own admiration, so far as I could ever make out from his private talk, approached the boundless, and would admit of no carping or fault-finding even from himself, were Dante, Luther, John Knox, Shakespeare, Cromwell, and Goethe ; and, as respects these six, or several of them, the objection to go along with him need not, in our quarter of the world at least, be very general. But among his minor heroes some have been voted more questionable, especially those in whom, despite his recommendations of them, the ordinary mind could see nothing but a representation of

energy, and even of brutal energy. One of the complaints against him, as you all know, has been on the ground of the frequency in his books of this deification of mere force, and the incessant propagation there of the paradox that might is right. He took the trouble at last to explain that he had been misunderstood in this matter, and that, if his teachings on the subject were properly investigated, it would be found perhaps that the maxim as it lay in his own heart was the reverse,—to wit that right in the long run is always might. But, without this transposition of the terms of the maxim, one can see how he could have defended its consistency with his central theory of things, and so his admiration for a great many historical persons whom others did not find at all admirable. Was not large *quantity* of existence or vitality in any individual a sufficient certificate, according to Carlyle's central theory of things, of the presence also in that individual of a corresponding amount of the excellent in *quality*,—*i.e.* of



genuine insight into the real "fact of things" at that time, adaptation to the divine in their tendency, and power of exact co-operation therewith? Must not the inner deep always answer to the outer deep; and in the real "fact of things" at any moment is there not always a great deal that cannot be interpreted or managed by sentimentalism, however beautiful, but only by force and sternness? In some such explanation, though it may not seem of much worth, Carlyle did take refuge in some of his estimates of men.

Very notable in the same connection, and explicable in the same manner, was his charity or indifference to the indubitable moral delinquencies and weaknesses in the lives of some of his heroes. For a man of such irreproachable honour and rectitude in his own conduct, so strong in every form of self-command save that of temper, his tolerance of aberrations from the standard of strict respectability in the lives of persons of the past he found reason to admire otherwise, —hardly, however, in those of contempor-

aries living round about him,—was really extraordinary. He construed the part by the whole in such cases, counted the frailties and sins of passion in such lives but as deflections in a great orbit, could condone on such a reckoning even the blackguardism of a Mirabeau, and would have torn to pieces any resurrectionary wretch that should have dared to snivel too sanctimoniously in his presence about the immoralities of Robert Burns.

One might pursue further the ramifications of Carlyle's root-theory into its particular social applications. Enough just to note his vehement oppugnance throughout his whole life, and especially in his later life, to the modern faith in Democracy, the equality of all men in respect of natural and political rights, and government by suffrage and the representation of majorities. In this also we see his fidelity to his root-theory. There always had been, and always would be, he thought, a radical inequality, amounting even to incommensurability, among human beings

(in respect of the amount of wisdom and goodness possessed by them individually, —i.e. in respect of that amount of the divine in themselves by which they are fitted to apprehend the external fact of things and promote God's purposes therein. Hence it had been eternally pre-appointed that the wiser everywhere should rule over the less wise, by guidance when possible, by compulsion when necessary; and that system of social conditions and arrangements was the best everywhere for any community which gave the greatest chance that the ablest and wisest persons in that community should be found in the governing places.

In any criticism of Carlyle in his character of a *moral force* working in and through literature, the most obvious consideration is that he had constituted himself from the first, and remained to the last, a preacher of just such structural faiths of the human spirit, as he conceived them to be, and just such immediate deri-

vatives from these, as we have been describing. In other words, he kept chiefly in his teachings to what he himself called the *dynamics* of human nature,—“the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of love and fear and wonder, of enthusiasm, poetry, religion, all which have a truly vital and infinite character,”—and did not concern himself so much with the *mechanics* of human nature, or that complexity of practical details and processes which one meets with in daily life and in the actual society of every body-politic. In still other words, perhaps more acceptable to some, it may be said that he drove through the world on the wheels of certain cardinal asseverations of his own constitution, which he took to be cardinal asseverations also of the human constitution in general, and therefore to be of universal, eternal, and *a priori* validity. No reason on that account to challenge his title to the distinction of even extraordinary greatness among his contemporaries. More than is imagined, the world is gov-

erned and always *has been* governed by asseverations ; and by what asseverations can it be better governed than by those put forth by its most gifted and noblest minds as expressing their own constitutional beliefs, their own deepest and most structural forms of faith ? The region of the dynamics in human affairs, though it may be vaguer in the sense of containing fewer objects and origins of power, *is* higher than the region of the mechanics, filled though that may be with a vaster multiplicity of more tangible interests. There is an elemental in the moral world as well as in the physical ; and, just as man's soul is moved most by contemplation of the great elemental objects and forces of the physical world, so those that can and will bring before their fellows impressively again and again the objects and forces of the morally elemental, less visible by kind, and apt to fade out of thought in the toil and bustle of life, are benefactors to their race and servants of the really highest. The simple generalities that

clothe themselves in such phrases as God, Truth, Justice, Right and Wrong, are perpetually in need of being refreshed among us; and it is but a poor criticism that would object to those who minister in this function that they teach nothing new and give no precise instructions for ordinary human conduct. Such men affect the very roots and foundations of our being, reinvigorate the total frame; and that is surely higher work than giving practical instructions in detail. To feel afresh in one's own soul, and to be able to reimpress upon others, the great moral and intellectual generalities of the universe, which are older than all the hills, is as essentially greatness, and of as high a kind, as the power to feel afresh and to reissue poetically the impressions of nature's largest physical appearances,—the sun, the starry heavens, the gloom and stillness of primeval forests, the roaring thunder, or the rolling sea. To this high and rare order of functionaries, regarded in all ages as moralists and spiritual teachers of the

supreme type, Carlyle, whatever else we may find in him, most certainly did belong. That there was a certain vagueness in his teaching in comparison with that of the only other men of his generation whom we can recognise as having been of any note as contemporary functionaries of the same order,—I mean the chiefs of the Christian clergy,—arose from the fact that his creed consisted only of a fervid natural theism with its immediate moral derivatives, while theirs included all the more definite articles of the Christian Theology or miraculous Biblical Metaphysic. On the other hand, did he not excel them all, or almost them all, in the intensity and tremendousness with which he inculcated and disseminated his creed, such as it was? Did he not stand out for fifty years as, in this respect, a living rebuke to the lukewarmness and lassitude of many of those whose express profession was that his creed was but naught at its best, and that they themselves were the accredited messengers of one so much richer and fuller? In com-

parison with him how many thousands of his contemporaries were liable to the charge of being dreadfully at ease in what they maintained to be their own better Zion! From what British pulpit, from what thousand British pulpits, has there been poured into the veins of the British community and of kindred peoples, within existing memory, a tide of more stimulating and rousing influence than that which came from the humble house of Carlyle at Chelsea?

What faults are to be set against these merits? Still attending to Carlyle's moral and spiritual teachings as they are to be found in his books, and leaving aside such questions as to his own behaviour and demeanour as have been started by Mr. Froude's revelations, I would point out as among Carlyle's greatest faults one into which he was carried, especially in later life, precisely by his acquired habit of making asseverations so vehemently and instantaneously out of his own constitution. He mixed up with those constitutional



asseverations which he could feel to be necessary and structural faiths of the human spirit, and which might pass for such, a great deal of asseveration, about various and sundry important things, that could not be so vindicated. A good many of his asseverations had no character of necessary or structural faiths of the human spirit at all, but were mere expressions of his own inherited prejudices, his casual likings and dislikings, his momentary tempers and irritations, his pugnacity and love of contradiction, the limitations of his private tastes, or even perhaps his revengeful recollection of slights and offences done to himself or to those in whom he felt an interest. With all his wonderful physiognomic insight and eye for character, there are certain gross misjudgments of his as to persons of eminence in his own time, some in literature and others in public life, not to be accounted for otherwise.

Further, though constitutional asseveration, when it is pure, may justly go very far, yet, even when it is purest, even when

the asseverations are the nearest possible to what will be admitted to be structural faiths of the human spirit, they do not always go the necessary length for human needs and uses. They do not serve for everything. Though the dynamical may be all-important, the mechanical has to follow. There is no structural faith of the human spirit, no constitutional asseveration, for example, that provides complete instruction as to the best method of shoeing a horse. That it ought to be done honestly, carefully, and according to the best method of horse-shoeing that may have been ascertained by experience,—constitutional asseveration may go as far as this, and it is most valuable *a priori* direction ; but the best actual method of shoeing is still in doubt, except in the mind of the required artist, and meanwhile the horse is waiting to be shod. So in higher matters. Once a celebrated lawyer and judge, chancing to be in a company where Carlyle was descanting in his usual style on eternal justice and the horrible forgetfulness of

the laws of eternal justice in modern society, tried to bring him to a stand-still by this very suggestion. "Pray, Mr. Carlyle," he said, "will you be so good as to *define* justice?" Carlyle, as you know, was never brought to a stand-still by any thing or any mortal. "I do not know, sir," he replied, "that I am provided off-hand with any definition of justice; that belongs rather to you and the other gentlemen of the robe here; all that I know is that there *is* such a thing, and that your ancestors and mine knew it too, and believed that, if they did not *do* it, they would be roasted for ever in sulphur." This was very well by way of colloquial retort; and indeed there was much more in it than mere dexterity in colloquial retort; but the lawyer's query did point to one of Carlyle's weaknesses.

Prevailingly *dynamical* though Carlyle's teachings were, he was by no means destitute of the *mechanical* talent in matters to which he chose to set his mind or hand. He was, if I may mention such a small

particular in such a context, one of the neatest-handed men I ever knew in tying up a parcel,—say a book-parcel, to go by post,—always doing it with the utmost economy of paper and string, the utmost security of knot, and yet the finest elegance of shape and general effect. A good deal of this deftness ran through his daily life. His love of order and accuracy was conspicuous even in trifles; he was eminently shrewd, prudential, and clear-headed, and could be very resolute, in his own economics and business transactions; and, in any case of practical difficulty that might be submitted to him by others, his advice never failed to be sound, deliberate, exact, and sagacious. Of that higher sagacity which depended on the acuteness of his dynamical perceptions, and the strength of his faith in the constant operation of the great dynamical laws in human society, there were some striking examples in political predictions of his, so verified beyond ordinary anticipation that people had to exclaim simultaneously “After all,

Carlyle has turned out right." Nor must we forget that in his purely literary character, his character of historical writer above all, he was so far from avoiding details that he actually revelled in them, employing his unmatched powers of word-painting on the minute and particular in every form as well as on the massive and spacious, with the result that his books are now storehouses of research available for those very purposes of practical cunning and Machiavellian statecraft for which he did not seem himself to care.

All this remembered, one cannot but remark as a defect in Carlyle's own direct moral and social teachings, and sometimes as a provoking defect, his contentedness to remain always within the region of the dynamical generalities, and refusal to concern himself with the specific practical problems of the when, the where, and the how. For example, incessantly though he preached his great general doctrine that the only heaven-appointed principle of government is that the ablest and best men in a state

ought to possess the governing power and to keep it, guiding the rest, and if necessary compelling them to obey, I remember but one place in his writings where,—in the shape of a suggestion that there might be a staff of so many permanent or ministerial members or assessors in the House of Commons, not elected by suffrage and irresponsible to any constituency,—he ever addressed himself to the practical question of how our modern British society could possibly be so manipulated, or possibly so jumbled, as to bring to the top, and keep there, the true and heaven-qualified governing atoms, or any proportion of such. Hence, even those who would go with him heartily in his main principle, and can find real and useful direction so far in remembering that principle and constantly repeating it to themselves, are stopped by the block of things about them, and can only stare at each other.

What was even worse, Carlyle not only refused the trouble of considerations of the merely mechanical kind himself, but re-

garded too generally with contempt the labours and speculations of others in that region. His impatience of reasoned political science in any form, and especially in the form of that modern Political Economy which he derided as "the dismal science," really shut him out, more than he was himself aware, from that intimacy with the "fact of things" which he defined so energetically as the all-essential necessity for men of all sorts and the sole attainable wisdom. It is by science only, by reasoned investigation only, that we can know, in any department, what *is* the real "fact of things"; and till we know, from the teachings of strict political science, whether in its present form of so-called Political Economy or in some larger and better form, all that we can know of the real "fact of things" in that department, our practical efforts in politics and philanthropy will continue to be, as they have too much been heretofore, mere knocking of our heads against stone walls, mere pourings of water into sieves. Not less in all

matters and contemplations physical and cosmological must we receive our instructions as to the real "fact of things" from the sciences thereto appertaining. If science tells us surely and conclusively that such and such was and has been the course of actual physical nature, then we are bound, whether we like it or not, to imagine the past physical course of things precisely in that manner; and, if we persist in imagining it one whit otherwise, we incur the guilt of opposing the light and are untrue to the "fact of things." Carlyle, as we have seen, acknowledged this; but it was but a passing acknowledgment. He was too old, his inveteracy in the constitutional faiths of his own spirit was too confirmed, to permit him to adjust these faiths to the new cosmological conceptions which science was making imperative in his later days, or even to perceive that it was of any great consequence that this should be done.

On this ground, as well as on the others that have been stated, may we not expect



that, when Nature shall see fit to produce another British man of letters with anything like coequality of general faculty with Carlyle, anything like coequality with him in strength in the great structural faiths, the new product will, by Nature's rule of never repeating herself in her highest specimens, be a man of very different type from Carlyle,—of more Goethe-like composure, more cheerfulness, wider sympathies with forms of Art other than his own, and more patient openness to abstract reasonings and to all that the sciences can teach? Let such a man come, and welcome; but it will be many and many a day before those who in the future shall speak the English tongue, in our British Islands or elsewhere, will cease, when they look back on the history of these Islands from 1795 to 1881, to think with veneration of the noble labours and great personality of Thomas Carlyle.

Will it be a weakness if, while remind-

ing you that this man was born in our little Scotland and went through the world with an unmistakeably Scottish accent, I readvert for a moment to his special connections with Edinburgh? Of the few public honours he accepted in his life two were from this city. One was the Lord-Rectorship of the University of Edinburgh, which he held from 1865 to 1868. The other was the Presidency of this Philosophical Institution, held by him from July 1868 to the day of his death. Though he held this honorary office for nearly thirteen years, only once, so far as I know, was he within your walls. It was early in September 1870. He was then passing through Edinburgh from Dumfriesshire on one of his periodical visits to his wife's grave at Haddington; and through the three or four days of his stay,—which he wanted to be as private as possible,—he was my guest in Regent Terrace, where my house then was. One of the mornings of his stay with us the news arrived of the collapse of the French Empire of Louis-

Napoleon by the surrender of the Emperor after the Battle of Sedan; and you may imagine with what interest he heard and read this news at the breakfast-table, and welcomed the assured transference of the political leadership in Continental Europe to his favourite Germans. It may have been on the evening of the same day,—it was certainly on an evening about that date,—that we went out together, rather late, for a stroll through the streets. At the latish hour, in that season of the year, few persons were about; and I do not think that any one we met recognised Carlyle, though his venerable and feebly stooping figure, in his usual brownish dress, with his broad felt hat, and a pair of easy shoes of a somewhat glaring buff colour which he had put on for the occasion, was sufficiently remarkable, and did attract some attention. By some chance, we took our way at last along Queen Street. As we were passing No. 4, it occurred to me to ask him whether he would not step in, and see at least the

shell of the Institution of which he was President. He consented, and we went in. I led him first to your news-room, into which he only glanced, hardly advancing beyond the door. Then I took him to the reading-room of the library. We went completely round that ; and, besides glancing generally at the surrounding shelves of books, he noted in passing the several busts in the room, his own included. The only bust he seemed to look at with any special curiosity was that of Adam Black. Opposite this he did linger for a moment or two, as if, though the man was known and interesting to him from reputation, the face was new. We were not more than three or four minutes in the room altogether ; there were very few readers at the tables ; and we came away without any sign that he had been recognised here either. This was, I believe, his one and only visit to your Institution ; and I have thought it but natural, in our present circumstances, to bring it to your recollection. It is but one of hundreds of little

incidents now very dear to myself in my retrospect of the seven-and-thirty years through which I knew Carlyle. "For I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any."

THE END.

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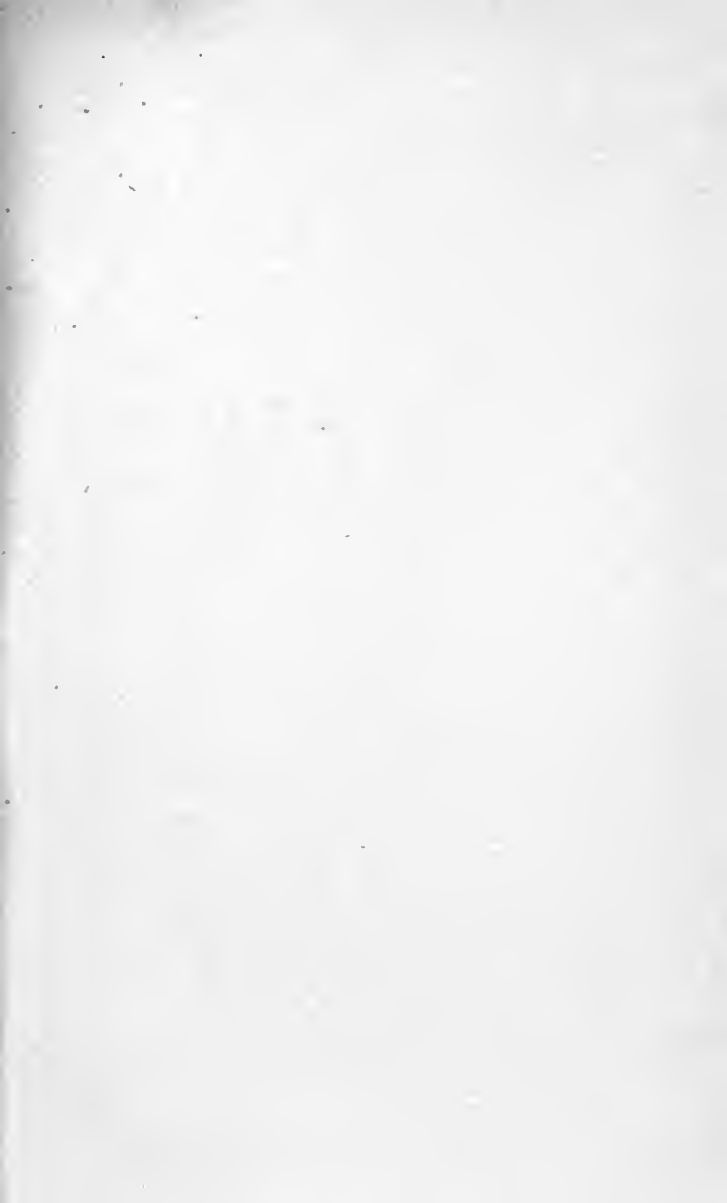
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